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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 QUITO 000868

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [EC](#)

SUBJECT: ECUADOR: POLITICAL SITUATION UPDATE

REF: QUITO 854

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reason 1.4 (b&d)

[11.](#) (C) Summary: Following a night of persistent protests centered on the Presidential Palace, in which one journalist died, the situation in Quito remains extremely volatile. Protests are ongoing and expected to grow. The Ambassador met with the President early on April 20 to urge a bold signal in the government's stance in favor of conciliation. Congress failed to make progress on April 19 to resolve the court issue and the opposition has united 52 deputies to seize control and move to destitute Gutierrez. National Police Chief has resigned in protest and the military high command has urged Gutierrez to announce a call to early elections. Rumors that the military has withdrawn their support from the President are rampant. End Summary.

Security

[12.](#) (C) Anti-government protests are occurring throughout the city, after the arrival of government supporters bused in from the coast. On April 19, anti-government protesters gathered in Carolina Park in the north of the city starting at 17H00. Entire families, including infants and grandparents, primarily convoked by Radio Luna, gathered in the park. Protesters later at approximately 18H15 proceeded south towards the Congress building to demand President Gutierrez' resignation. Protesters clashed with police at the well-guarded Presidential Palace until approximately 02H00 on April 20. Newspapers estimated the group numbered up to an exaggerated 100,000, however RSO estimates are closer to 12,000. Feared confrontations between pro- and anti-government protesters were avoided on April 19.

[13.](#) (U) In the city center, a 58 year-old Chilean photographer and Quito resident, died of a heart attack suffered during the protests on April 19. His family members and the Red Cross blamed exposure to tear gas for his death. According to the Red Cross and the 911 service, as of April 20 00H10, approximately 180 protesters suffered asphyxiation from tear gas, and 18 received injuries. Many protesters lit small fires to help dissipate the tear gas. Protests continue on the morning of April 20 with several student groups gathering in various sections of the city.

Embassy Actions

[14.](#) (C) The Ambassador met with Minister of Trade Ivonne Baki and Ambassador-designate to the US Mauricio Pozo on April 20 and accompanied them to the Presidential residence. They urged the President to consider taking dramatic steps to signal reconciliation, to include: convincing ex-President Abdala Bucaram, whose presence has destabilized the political situation, to leave the country; announcing a Cabinet of reconciliation to replace hard-line Ministers (of Government and Foreign Affairs) with moderates; go on television immediately to urge reconciliation; and reach out to international organizations, to possibly include the OAS, to enlist help in building a new judicial system.

[15.](#) The Ambassador emphasized that it was imperative for the President to act now, not just to help himself, but for the good of the country. In a conciliatory television address, the President should emphasize that he had heard the people and their concerns, that he is glad the people are involved, that a peaceful solution must be found, and that the Cabinet will be opening space for dialogue. The President should also say that his Foreign Minister's efforts to enlist support from international organizations to help resolve the court issue. The President said he had already sent intermediaries to opposition leaders (including Nebot in Guayaquil), however the Ambassador emphasized that he needed to call Bucaram personally, and convince him to leave, as soon as possible. The President sent Baki to meet with Quito mayor Paco Moncayo (ID) and Pozo meet with prefect Ramiro Gonzalez to ask for a call for calm. Baki would also call Guayaquil mayor Jaime Nebot (PSC) though the Guayaquil situation is much more in hand.

Government Response

[16.](#) (U) Government Spokesperson Carlos Polit indicated on

April 19 that the President has no intention of resigning. During the height of the April 19 evening protests, Ivan Ona, Presidential Secretary of Communication, publicly stated that the government is ready to form a "government of conciliation." Oscar Ayerve, Minister of Government, said on April 19 that he believed the public discontent was due to the need to form a new Supreme Court. Ayerve said that the responsibility for resolving the situation was now in the hands of Congress.

17. (U) Renan Borbua, a Patriotic Society Party leader and cousin of the President, told media that beginning in the evening of April 19, buses filled with Gutierrez supporters would be leaving coastal cities for Quito. This travel is reportedly financed by the Ministry of Social Welfare. Evangelical indigenous that had marched in Quito earlier on April 19 to support the President, were no longer in the city center during the evening avoiding feared clashes with anti-government protesters.

Vice President

18. (U) VP Palacio issued a statement in "solidarity with the Ecuadorian people" at noon on April 20, and called on the police and military to "respect the democratic role they have played historically."

Congress

19. (C) On April 20, 52 opposition members of Congress (PSC, ID, Pachakutik, MPD and some independents) left the session to reconvene elsewhere, to vote out Congress president Quintana and then turn to declaring President Gutierrez mentally unfit to serve. On April 19, the president of Congress, Omar Quintana (PRE), blocked the opposition parties (PSC, ID, and PK) from approving a mechanism to designate the new Supreme Court justices. Quintana did not include the Organic Law on Judicial Functions in the day's agenda because, he said, there was no report for a first debate over the bill. The ordinary session began at 10H50, and quickly disintegrated into chaos. Quintana closed the session at 13H30. Quintana said that the Civil and Penal Commission, led by Sandra Sandoval (PRE), would present the document in an extraordinary session at 16H00 on April 20 for debate. PolOff spoke with Sandoval on the morning of April 20, however, and she said there would be no report today.

Military and Police

10. (C) Early on April 20, Radio Luna spread the rumor that the military high command had withdrawn its support from the President. The 31 members of the military high command met until the early hours of April 20 at the Ministry of Defense. A public declaration from the high command is expected. Commander General of the police Jorge Poveda resigned on the morning of April 20 stating he did not want to be a part of confrontations with protesters. It is reported that General Marc Cuvero Velez will be his replacement.

Third Party Efforts

11. (U) PolChief met with Nestor Herrera Heredia, President of the Episcopal Conference of the Catholic Church (CEE), on April 19 which has offered to facilitate dialogue between the President and opposition. The CEE issued a statement on April 19 calling for: 1) putting capable and honorable magistrates, independent of any political party, in the courts; 2) respecting the division and independence of the government branches to guarantee against the abuse of power; 3) ridding political parties of opportunities; 4) permitting a wider participation of social movements in resolving conflicts. No direct meetings between the government and opposition have taken place.

Next Steps

--RSO will continue to monitor the security situation. Several tripwires have already been reached, however, there have been no known direct threats or incidents involving AmCits.
--All non-essential activities will be curtailed to include TDY.

--RSO will set a 20H00 curfew.

--Liberal Administrative Leave will go into effect for the afternoon of April 20 as well as for April 21.

--CONS will be sending out an updated warden message to AmCits.

--CONS will review F77 reports.

--The Consulate will be closed to the public until the situation improves.

--No country clearances will be issued until further notice.

--POL will reach out to Congress to urge restraint and respect for the Constitution.

KENNEY